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ABSTRACT

Stressing that children need opportunities to grow and learn according to their own individual needs, this paper discusses appropriate reading objectives for kindergarten children and suggests numerous activities for kindergarten children who know how to read. The first part of the paper deplores the current trend to skip important developmental experiences in kindergarten in order to take children directly to the abstract experiences involved in skill-based reading and workbook lessons; notes that kindergarten should not be thought of as preparation for first grade and that not all kindergarten children should be reading; and suggests ways of setting up an individualized reading program that makes use of self-selected books to encourage and challenge children who are already reading. The major portion of the paper describes a variety of reading-related activities for kindergarten children who can read, including: (1) a child-made game based on a topic in which children are interested; (2) teacher-made games involving matching words and answering riddles and other questions; and (3) activities involving children in making books, writing stories, studying foreign languages, writing captions for comic strips, following directions, making greeting cards, creating secret codes, writing and illustrating stories based on children's picture books, and working with experience charts. (GT)

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But I Already Can!

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But I Already Can!

"...Children are not cars that you turn off an assembly line. Children come to us different; and if we do our job well, they should emerge from our experiences even more different, and not alike, as one Ford is like the other."

Ira J. Gordon

Today with the cry for accountability ringing in our ears, teachers feel that they should try to make all children into "Fords" and we cry out with such exclamations as, "All my children ought to learn to read sometime during the kindergarten year, shouldn't they?"

Another teacher says, "My school has bought this new reading series and if it is to be successful, the instruction should begin in kindergarten. Tommy and Mary could handle the regimentation of it because they seem to be more mature, and yet they seem to find so many trade books which are exciting--and yes, vital to them in their unique conceptual development."

Another teacher remembers how much fun kindergarten used to be and how excited children became about the many learning experiences that went on daily during this vital year. There was time to talk together about the wonder of snowflakes, the excitement of a new baby brother or sister, the sadness at the loss of a pet, the trip to a new store with Mother and Daddy. But you know, there just isn't time for this any more. It takes all morning to get the groups through their basal reading material and the many accompanying worksheets.

So where have we gone wrong? From Piaget's developmental studies and the many replications of this research, from Bruner's extensive studies, from Gordon, Elkind, and Hunt, we are clearly shown that real learning is not a matter of mass education to large groups of children assigned to particular

ability level groups. Rather, it is an individual matter. Children have their own time tables and need opportunities to grow and learn according to their own particular needs.

Elkind describes the process as structure formation, the time in which the child needs to have concrete experiences for conceptual development. This period is filled with self-selected repetitive experiences, such as counting, requesting the same story over and over, and pouring water from one container to another many, many times.

Now the problem today is that we are skipping this very important developmental stage and taking children right into the more abstract experiences, such as reading skill-based stories from basal readers and, most inappropriately, having them circle abstractions on worksheets so that we can be "accountable."

Another concern is that all children in our kindergarten must be ready for first grade. This readiness cannot, it seems, be measured by a self-confident, well coordinated, happy child who feels very excited about the prospect of more learning. Rather, the measuring stick is "Has he finished level I of a particular reading series?" and "tested well!"

So, in all this, the real, well-supported reason for kindergarten has been lost! It has come to mean a place where you get children ready for the next grade. And because there is no longer time to meet the developmental needs, for many children even kindergarten is a time for failure and a damaged self-concept which will cause learning to be impaired until the child is lucky enough to find a teacher who is brave enough and cares enough to show him/her that he/she is important, not the texts and not the readiness for the next grade.

Kindergarten is not preparation for the next grade or for life; it is a very important developmental stage--and it is life itself for that child at the particular time.

All of this tells us clearly that all kindergarten children should not be reading; for a great many of them, the structure formation activities should be in the block corner, housekeeping corner, language center with puppets, flannel board characters and picture books, and sand and water tables. These are individual rights that children should have.

Yet there are children who "already can" read when they come to us in kindergarten. They have the right to be encouraged and taught in such a way that reading continues to be meaningful and exciting, not hum-drum and mechanical. This necessitates a combination of concrete, self-selected learning activities as well as opportunities and encouragement to select appropriate reading materials.

If the classroom atmosphere is one of acceptance of the uniqueness of all human beings, then the other children will take pride in the fact that "Tommy can really read and you know, he's teaching me to read, too. Of course, I get to show him how to build really neat castles and make dinosaurs at the sand table. I like school! It's fun!"

These children who are already reading must be encouraged, nurtured and challenged daily not with systematic, controlled vocabulary books, but with books selected by the children themselves because the context and vocabulary are palatable to them. Daily individual conferences with these children will reveal to a sensitive teacher the appropriateness of the content, the skill needs, and the additional learning activities needed for particular children.

An individualized reading program can easily be set up in any kindergarten classroom. Its requirements are simple. First, gather books, books, books! These are available from the school library, books children bring from home, or dividend books from book clubs. Second, set up an area in the room for reading. A "library corner" is a standard in most kindergarten classrooms. It can be enhanced by a special book case that holds the Books We Can Read. Pillows or

bean-bag chairs invite use and a small table and chairs aid the teacher as she holds the individual conferences. And third, an attitude on the part of the teacher that reading a book is a valued activity for Jim or Lisa who already can. Brousing, looking, and being read to is just as valuable for Tom and Sara who can't.

Children who are reading in kindergarten are often also creative and anxious for challenging involvement. The following activities have been tried and found to work successfully with children who "already can."

GAMES

Child made

Children enjoy developing their own games around a topic in which they are interested. It may be a sport, a super hero, or cartoon favorite. In helping them to do this, follow these steps:

1. Choose your topic, e.g., baseball.
2. Find a source, i.e., rules book, program from a ball game, etc.
3. List the components - balls, strikes, outs, home runs, runs, bases, positions, dug out, score board.
4. Establish a procedure for playing the game.
   a. Draw a card (shape of a baseball)
   b. Read the word on the card.
   c. Respond with some action if it is read. If not, bury the card in the deck and wait for the next turn.
   d. Determine a scoring procedure.
   e. Determine at what point the game will end.
5. Decide which of the components will be used and how.
6. Assign people to make various parts in a "rough draft" form.
7. Play the game.
8. Make changes.

9. Play the game again.
10. Make the game in final form.
11. Play the game.
12. Teach the game to other friends.

Teacher Made

These games can be used by two children in a game situation.

Mathcing

1. Each child has a pack of the same words on cards. They shuffle their deck, draw a card and place the card, word side up, on the table, reading the word on the card aloud. If the words are the same, they each get a point. If the words are different, they don't get a point. They play until they get a specified number of points, depending on how many cards there are in the deck.
2. Each child has a tree with apples on it.
   A simple word, such as on, in, down, stop, etc. is printed on each of the apples. Each child also has a set of apples that has opposite words printed on them (off, out, up, etc.). At a signal, the children place the "opposite word apple" on top of the one on the tree. They check each other's words. The first one finished, with all correct, wins. They can trade apples and cards and play again.
3. Riddles
   Place riddles on 3x5 cards. Have one child read the riddle to a friend and the friend guesses. Then they trade jobs. (The children can dictate additional riddles for inclusion in the riddle game.)

Example:

This can go.

It runs on the ground.

It is big and holds many things at once.

It runs on a track.

It is a _____.

This animal has fur.

It sleeps all winter.

It can growl.

It is a _____.

4. Silly situations:

These are placed on 3x5 cards. One child reads to another or two others. They decide which answer is best. They take turns reading the situations.

Example:

You are in trouble and you need someone to help you. Would you call on... Big Billy Goat?

Jack from Jack in the Beanstalk?

Rapunzel?

Little Pig in the brick house?

Why?

Example:

You are looking for a new house. Would you live with...

The Seven Dwarfs?

The Little Pig who build a straw house?

Sleeping Beauty?

Why?

Example:

You need someone to help you fix some food. Would you choose...

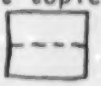
The Little Red Hen?

Mother Bear in The Three Bears?

Peter Rabbit's Mother?

Why?

BOOKS

Young children love to make books they can read. Parents respond positively to these books too and keep them for many years. These books can be an outgrowth of a social studies, science, or general unit topic. Using an 8 1/2 x 11 sheet of manilla paper, cut the paper in half.  Place a ruled line near the bottom of each page on both sides. Fold down the middle. Each piece of 8 1/2 x 11 manilla will make two, four-page books. With the children, make a list on an experience chart of words they would like to have in their book. If they like to print, they can copy four words into the book and illustrate them. One rule should be that in order for a word to be placed in the book, the child must be able to read it. If they cannot copy from an experience chart, place the words on small slips of manilla so that they can copy from something closer at hand. It often happens that children who read are not yet able to print. If they cannot copy the words, run them off on a ditto master and let the child cut out the word, paste it on the page of the book and illustrate.

Story Writing

This can be done as a group or individual project. The child or children can set the "rules" for writing stories.

1. Choose no more than 5 characters.
2. Decide what kind of story it will be; mystery, fairy tale, adventure, etc.

3. Decide where and when it will take place.
4. If it is a fairy tale, something magical must happen and it must have a happy ending.
5. It must have a beginning, some kind of problem, and a resolution of the problem.

These stories can be typed or mimeographed for the children to put into a book and read. They also can be acted out and performed for other children or parents.

Foreign Language

The children enjoy having a name in the language under study. They can soon read each other's Spanish, French, or whatever names, if name tags are made and worn.

Numbers, colors, or word books can be made and read in the manner described above.

A pen-pal in the country under study can be fun. Letters and drawings can be exchanged.

Comic Strips

Comic Strips with little or no dialogue can be cut from the Sunday newspaper, mounted, and laminated. The children can write the captions and "balloons" can be attached with masking tape. They then can be read.

Center Experiences

A file folder can be used to present directions for center activity. The children who can read, read these directions to the others.

Directions for making a kazoo and finding out if bubbles are always round can be derived from the books:

White, Laurence B., Jr., Science Games. Addison-Wesley

White, Laurence B., Jr., Science Puzzles. Addison-Wesley

White, Laurence B., Jr., Science Toys. Addison-Wesley
White, Laurence B., Jr., Science Tricks. Addison-Wesley

WRITE YOUR NAME: Materials needed: different kinds of writing tools.	WRITE YOUR NAME: 1. Look at all the writing tools. How are they different? 2. Write your name with each tool. How is your name different when you use each tool?	Place directions, paper, and several different writing tools; pen, pencil, magic marker, chalk, crayon, etc. on a table during work time. Encourage use.
FLOAT AND SINK: Materials needed: Tank of water Things Blue paper White paper	FLOAT AND SINK: 1. Place things in the water one by one. 2. If they sink, put them on the blue paper 3. If they float, put them on white paper.	Place directions, tank of water, things, and a sheet each of blue and white paper on a table during work time. Encourage use.

Cards

Cards can be made for birthdays, Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, etc. Various greetings can be dictated by the children and then copied or duplicated cut and pasted into the card as described above. The child must be able to read the greeting in order to use it. The cards can be decorated and taken home or distributed.

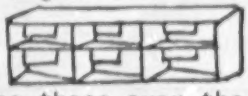
Codes

What the child wants to say must first be written out. Then the code must be decided upon and applied. Some codes might be derived by:

1. number substitution
2. moving forward or backward one letter in the alphabet
3. picture or character substitution

These need to be fairly simple and the messages short.

Room Mail Boxes

Both the cards and coded messages can be placed in students' individual mail boxes by the creator. To make these, get some cardboard boxes from the grocery store that have compartments.  Make a slip of paper with each child's name on it. Place these over the compartments and the children have their own mail box.

Use of Picture Books

Any number of good children's books lend themselves to creative thinking, reading, and writing activities.

Some are listed below:

1. A Hole Is To Dig - by Ruth Krauss

   Read the story and have the children write similar sentences. These can be placed on an experience chart for the children to read back and/or made into a book for them to read and illustrate.

2. Kickle-Snifters and Other Fearsom Critters - by Alvin Schwartz

   The children make up and illustrate some of their own. Write their dictated story on the paper next to the illustration. Bind them into a class book or mount on a bulletin board.

3. The Marvelous Mud Washing Machine and Pickle, Pickle, Pickle Juice - by Patty Wolcott.

   Encourage the children to write and illustrate stories similar to these. They can be bound into a class book for reading.

Experience Charts

These offer an endless supply of reading material for the kindergarten room. They can be done daily and bound in book- or hanging-chart form for the children to read. Topics could be unit oriented. Some possibilities might be:

Mad is... Happiness is... I am afraid of...

Wishes... Things I can do now that I am 5... Ooblick feels like...

Things I can't do because I am 5... Signs of Fall...

Lists can also be made. These can be illustrated by either the children or the teacher. Such lists could be:

Foods I eat for breakfast Animals who are awake at night

Fruits Fairy tale characters

Halloween symbols

The game approach encourages further reading and also reinforces skills already known. It further serves as a way for the reader to positively use his skill in interactions with peers, thus building a positive attitude toward reading for all children.

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